

'Best remedy for bad speech is more speech'

US counterterrorism specialist on combating radicalisation

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

John T Godfrey, deputy coordinator for regional and multilateral affairs, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism under the US Department of State, was in Dhaka on a two-day (August 18, 19) visit.

During the visit, Godfrey -- who is responsible for the Bureau's Office of South and Central Asia and the Near East; Office of Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas; and the Office of Multilateral Affairs -- attended a roundtable on "counterterrorism and countering violent extremism" at the US embassy with academics, journalists and experts from other relevant sectors. In an interview, he shared his views on the subject with The Daily Star.



John T Godfrey

should repatriate those individuals and prosecute them where appropriate, but there should certainly be programmes in place that provide for the appropriate monitoring, deradicalisation and reintegration of those individuals. One of our concerns is that leaving them where they are in north-eastern Syria might be feasible in the short term, but in the long run this could create problems -- both for Bangladesh and other places those individuals might travel to.

FTFs have started moving to different countries, especially in South Asia after the IS was dismantled. How alarming is it?

Godfrey: Some of those individuals [FTFs] are very dangerous people and there is concern that if they are able to move to other countries, they will re-establish their networks and develop capabilities -- posing threats to those countries.

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has been silent for a long time. Do you think they pose a threat to Bangladesh?

Godfrey: The world's attention for the past several years has understandably been focused on IS, because of the events in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

Al-Qaeda, being an opportunistic organisation, has quietly taken advantage of this to rebuild its capacity and expand its network. We are quite concerned that they are poised to do something to reassert their position.

I would say AQIS very much fits in that broader trend.

Self-radicalisation through online content has become a major threat. What would be your suggestion to stop the "lone-wolf" or "wolf pack" attacks and home-grown radicalisation?

Godfrey: It is not possible to give a simple answer to this. It's a complex challenge that involves a range of efforts running in parallel to and complementing each other to help change the mentality of individuals who are self-radicalised and also the environment.

It's important to understand that often people go through traumatic events or challenges that leave them vulnerable to radicalisation. Having systems, programmes in place that allow people to understand what those signs of radicalisation look like -- when someone is going through that kind of experience -- provide for effective intervention to

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steer people off the path of radicalisation.

It's a challenging task but it's something really important -- particularly in societies where there are people who feel marginalised for a number of reasons.

Will shutting down websites be enough for combating radicalisation?

Godfrey: Unfortunately, again this is an issue where there is no single solution. Shutting down websites or removing content from the internet is not sufficient to really address those issues. The techniques that have proven to work better over time are alternative narratives or so-called counter narratives.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Four Gulshan buildings fined Tk three lakh

DNCC launches 'combing operation' to kill Aedes mosquitoes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the official launching of "combing operation" yesterday, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) imposed fine of Tk three lakh on the owners of four buildings for finding Aedes mosquito larvae on the sites.

At around 10am, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam officially launched the combing operation, aiming to destroy the Aedes mosquito breeding grounds in all 36 wards. The operation will begin in the newly added 18 wards later.

The drive began at ward-19 in Gulshan-1 area after the programme. The mayor along with the programme's chief guest Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed visited a building at road-1 in Gulshan-1.

Aedes mosquito larvae were found on the rooftop of the building, and the owner was fined Tk one lakh on the spot.

Later, a mobile court led by DNCC Magistrate Sajid Anwar fined one building Tk one lakh and another Tk 50,000 in Gulshan-1, while it fined a building in Gulshan-2 Tk 50,000.

The magistrate said that the money collected from the drive is going to the "miscellaneous fund" of the government, and therefore city corporations cannot use the money directly.

During the drive, DNCC officials posted stickers in residential areas where they found mosquito larvae.

DNCC mayor said their inspection teams will visit houses in each area during the combing operation and if they find Aedes larvae, they will post stickers which read, "Aedes larvae were found here".

Describing this as the initial warning, he said they will warn the house owners again if larvae are found there after ten days.

"And finally, they'll be fined if the situation is found to be the same during the next visit after another ten days," he added.

Earlier on Monday, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) fined owners of nine buildings Tk 2.28 lakh for finding Aedes mosquito larvae.

Meanwhile, yesterday DSCC and City Development Journalist Forum Bangladesh jointly organised a programme to kill Aedes mosquitoes at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

While speaking at the programme, DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon said, "Under the directive of the prime minister, all government organisations are working with full effort to control this outbreak. We hope it will be completely under control by the first week of September."

The number of dengue infections and Aedes mosquito prevalence have started to decrease as the authorities concerned have given special importance to destroy mosquito breeding grounds, he said.

The mayor added, DSCC has already launched drives at 58,748 houses under the city corporation to destroy Aedes mosquito larvae.

Besides, members of Bangladesh Scouts have carried out inspections in 1,11,000 houses, Khokon said.

Currently, the two city corporations are using insecticides two times a day -- one in the morning to kill the larvae and the other in the evening to kill the adult mosquitoes.

DNCC and DSCC are using newly arrived insecticides Malathion and Deltamethrin respectively.

Besides, awareness campaign is being conducted at schools and residential areas by the city corporations.

Are you partnering with Bangladesh in countering violent extremism?

Godfrey: Yes, we are. The [US] embassy has a range of programmes in partnership with the government of Bangladesh. These are implemented in different parts of the country and target different groups who are considered to be at risk.

What is your take on violent extremism in Bangladesh?

Godfrey: Bangladesh obviously has had the unfortunate experience of acts of terrorism committed here, some of them recently. I think the one that grabbed everyone's attention was the terrible attack at Holey Artisan Bakery in 2016, and following the incident, the government took a number of steps to dismantle the network that had conducted that attack.

There has been some success in dealing with that particular threat. I think there's concern regarding Bangladesh being located in a region where Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist groups have shown interest in trying to develop capacity and perhaps even establish a presence. Going forward, a high level of attention on efforts to mitigate that threat is needed.

Bangladesh has decided that it will not allow foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to return to the country. Do you think this will help in addressing the issue?

Godfrey: Our policy is that FTFs' countries of origin

Land owner of FR tower gets bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to the land owner of FR Tower, SMHI Faruque, considering his illness and old age, till August 29 in connection with the cases filed for illegal extension of the high-rise in Banani that caught fire on March 27.

The devastating fire left 25 people dead and 73 others injured.

Yesterday, Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Senior Special Judge's Court in Dhaka passed the order a day after Faruque's arrest when he was produced before it with a forwarding report.

Md Abu Bakar Siddique, a deputy director of the Anti-Corruption Commission and also the investigation officer of the case, produced Faruque before it in the afternoon.

The IO appealed to the court to keep the accused in jail until the investigation is complete. Moreover,

ACC Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajol told the court that the accused was involved in illegally extending the building.

Meanwhile, defense lawyer Sheikh Baharul Islam submitted a bail petition saying that his client is now about 80 years old and he has been suffering from different ailments including hearing impediment.

On Monday, Faruque was arrested from Gulshan area around 1:30pm.

On June 25, ACC filed two cases accusing 23 people for their alleged involvement in illegally extending the building. The accused include a former chairman of Rajuk, chairman of Rupayan Housing Estate Ltd and several government officials.

In an ACC enquiry, it was discovered that the 23-storey FR Tower had no fire alarm, narrow exit points and staircases, blocked fire exits and other issues. Besides, although the

authorities had legally obtained a permission for a 15-storey building, they made FR Tower a 23-storey building with time. As a result, the casualties peaked.

ACC sued 20 and five people respectively in two cases filed over illegal extension of FR Tower from 16th to 18th and 19th to 23rd floors. Two of the accused were charged in both cases.

On Monday, another accused Tasvir Ul Islam, one of the owners of FR Tower, got bail in the same cases after he was produced before the same court.

Moreover, Liakat Ali Khan alias Mukul, 57, chairman of Rupayan Group -- the builder company of FR Tower, got bail in the cases on August 8 after his surrender. While assistant director of Rajuk Shah Md Sadrul Alam was arrested on July 28 and is now in jail in the same cases.

9TH WAGE BOARD FOR JOURNOS No bar to publish gazette: SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday cleared the way for the government to publish the gazette notification on implementing the recommendation of ninth wage board for journalists.

The apex court stayed for eight weeks the High Court order that issued status quo on publication of the gazette.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain passed the order following a petition filed by the government, seeking a stay on the HC order.

Attorney General Mahubey Alam represented the government while advocate AF Hasan Arif appeared for the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab).

On August 6, the HC issued the status quo for two months. The court also issued a rule asking the respondents to explain why the unilateral finalisation of the award by the ninth wage board without giving the stakeholders opportunity to raise objections to the recommendations should not be declared illegal.

On Monday, the SC bench fixed yesterday for passing the order.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

DU, JU students protest attack on Ducsu VP Nur

DU CORRESPONDENT

A section of Dhaka University students formed a human chain on the campus yesterday, protesting the repeated attacks on Ducsu Vice President Nurul Haque Nur.

Under the banner of "General Students of Dhaka University", around 100 students took part in the programme, where they also demanded that the authorities provide necessary security to Nur.

"The attacks on Ducsu VP prove that no one is safe. If the attackers are not brought to book, they would be more aggressive and carry out such attack again and again," said Nusrat Tabassum, a third-year student of Linguistics department.

Hasanul Banna, a master's student, said, "It

is known to all that BCL activists are involved with the attacks. I request the prime minister to provide proper security to him [Nur] and bring the attackers to book."

Meanwhile, quota reformists of Jahangirnagar University (JU) also protested the recent attack on the Ducsu VP in Patuakhali.

The leaders and activists of "Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad" formed a human chain in front of JU Shaheed Minar around 11:30am.

At the human chain, Abu Sayeed, co-coordinator of the organisation, said, "Nur has been repeatedly attacked by those belonging to the ruling party, but the attackers are being sheltered."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

DHAKA TODAY

DISCUSSION

Spirit of Liberation War & Ideology of Bangabandhu
Organiser: Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee
Venue: Bangladesh National Museum
Time: 4pm

WORKSHOP

Application of Applied Behaviour Analysis
Organiser: Countrywide Health Initiative for Learning & Development
Venue: Gulshan North Club Limited
Time: 9am

PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVAL

One Click One Story
Organiser: Photographers Club Bangladesh
Venue: Drik Gallery
Time: 11am

EXHIBITION

Architectural designs will be displayed remembering the August 21 grenade attack
Venue: Shilpakala Academy
Time: 6:30pm

PHOTO OF THE DAY

PALASH KHAN



It has been a hot day, and they have been on the road since morning -- selling flowers, peanuts and water. So these boys decided to take a break, that too in the best possible way, by taking a dip in the fountain at the Bijoy Sarani intersection. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

'What is the condition of Dhaka's canals?'

ACC asks DC, Wasa to respond within 15 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has asked Dhaka's deputy commissioner (DC) and Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) to report to the commission about the status of the capital's canals.

In two separate letters signed by ACC Director General Sayeed Mahub Khan, the anti-graft watchdog yesterday asked for a response within 15 working days.

"It was seen in published reports by the media and researchers that most of the government canals under the watch of Dhaka's deputy commissioner and Wasa have been occupied by influential land grabbers," read the letters.

Besides, many canals have been filled due to lack of proper renovation and excavation, or due to dumping rubbish, they said.

The letters read, "Due to the environmental imbalance, natural disasters and waterlogging are becoming acute day by day."

Against this backdrop, it is necessary to recover grabbed canals and bring them under government control to protect the environment and solve waterlogging.

ACC asked both the authorities to inform on how many canals are under their jurisdiction and of these how many are grabbed.

The authorities were also asked to report on steps they have taken to recover these canals from grabbers.

In December 2017, the High Court directed the government to prepare an action plan and create a list of land grabbers for recovering 50 canals in Dhaka city corporation zones by July 2018.

The government, however, took more time from the HC to formulate the action plan, sources said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

ATTACK ON HASINA'S TRAIN HC accepts appeals of 43 convicts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday accepted three separate appeals by 43 convicts in a case filed over attack on a train carrying the then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina in Pabna's Ishwardi 25 years ago.

The HC bench of Justice Md Ruhul Quddus and Justice SM Abdul Mobin agreed to take the appeals after defence lawyer Barrister Kayser Kamal moved a prayer in this regard.

Barrister Kayser told The Daily Star that the HC will set a date later for hearing the appeals.

The 43 convicts on July 21 filed the appeals with the HC seeking acquittal of the charges in the case.

Among the convicted appellants, who are now in jail, eight were sentenced to death, 22 were sentenced to life imprisonment and 13 were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment by the lower court concerned.

On July 3 this year, a Pabna court awarded death to nine people, life imprisonment to 25, and 10 years' rigorous imprisonment to 13 in the case filed under the Explosives Substances Act, 1908.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5